

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
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OFFICE OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

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Preliminary Guide to Records Relating to African Americans
in the North Carolina State Archives

Black slaves were imported into North Carolina as early as 1694. As early as 1790, free blacks and slaves constituted about twenty-five percent of the population of the state. However, very few records either in the counties or in state agencies can be identified as relating solely to African-American Carolinians. Unlike its laws, the records of North Carolina have never observed a color line, and with rare exceptions they have never distinguished between blacks and whites. In most instances, information about people of African descent is buried in data relating to the entire population. For example, marriages of free blacks prior to 1868 are documented in marriage bonds. There is no color line in wills or deeds, or in land grants, or in cases before the North Carolina Supreme Court. Therefore, few records series among the public records in the North Carolina State Archives that deal specifically and exclusively with blacks. In the private collections even fewer papers relate to or were created by African-Americans.

County Records

County records do contain some information about black North Carolinians. Some of these records are: bonds, particularly apprentice bonds; court records, especially minute books of county courts of pleas and quarter sessions; estate records that include lists of slaves by name; land records that include the deeds of sale and deeds of gift for slaves that are recorded in deed books; tax records that list the number of slaves owned by the party that is being taxed; wills that bequeath slaves or emancipate them; and warden of the poor records.

Other county records, however, do relate exclusively to slaves and free persons of color. They are: cohabitation records, marriage records, slave papers, and to a lesser degree, the miscellaneous records.



“The Tar Heel Family” scene from 1951 Movie